

History 283
Honors Seminar: Slave Revolts in the Americas
Prof. Steve Kantrowitz
Spring 2008

Tuesdays, 1:20-3:20
5257 Humanities

Introduction

This seminar will introduce you to the methods and questions of modern history through an exploration of slave revolts and conspiracies, dramatic events whose potential and reality shaped the development, crisis, and collapse of the New World slave system in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Students who work hard will leave the seminar with the foundations of an education in history. Even those who never take another history course will come away with crucial skills for any future work in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Some of our common readings, listed below, are available at Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative, 426 W. Gilman. Others will be available via JSTOR or Learn@UW.

- * Kenneth Greenberg, ed., *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*
- * Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*
- * Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in 18th-century Manhattan*
- * Laurent Dubois and David Geggus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*
- * *Two Slave Rebellions at Sea* (Frederick Douglass, "The Heroic Slave" and Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno")

Writing Assignments

Unless specifically stated otherwise, all writing assignments are to be submitted via Learn@UW no later than 11:59 p.m. Monday before the class as Microsoft Word or RTF documents, double-spaced, with 12-point type.

Reflection and short essay assignments

Collectively, these assignments are worth 40% of your final grade.

Individual reports

Each student will do one major in-class report on one of the significant scholarly works listed for Feb. 26, March 25, or April 15. Individual reports require students to read the book in question with care, examine scholarly book reviews, and prepare a two-part presentation. This presentation will consist of 1) a 10-minute report including a description of the book's subject, argument(s), methods, and sources, a brief critical analysis, and a brief discussion of the work's relationship to previous readings, and 2) a discussion of a primary source, chosen by the student, either drawn from the work or drawn from elsewhere but building on the work's themes.

The report should be accompanied by a one-page single-spaced summary of your assessment of the work (subject, arguments, methods, sources, critiques/questions) and a copy of the document you wish to discuss with the class. Please bring 15 copies of your summary and your document with you on the day of your presentation.

We will work on the theatrical aspects of presentation, but your report will be graded primarily on intellectual quality. This assignment is worth 10% of your final grade.

Final essay

During the last three weeks of the semester each student will work on a substantial essay of historical analysis or interpretation. See below for details. This essay will be worth 20% of your final grade.

Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

Week 1: Jan. 22 - Introductions

Who we are, why we are here, what we will be doing.

Week 2: Jan. 29 – Slave Revolts in American Culture and Memory

read: Greenberg, ed., *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*

write: Who had the most to gain or lose by shaping popular accounts of Turner's revolt? In about 250-300 words, identify two or three people or groups and explain how and why they sought to shape the way people outside Southampton understood the story. **5%**

view: *A Troublesome Property* – to be screened during seminar meeting.

additional meeting this week:

Thursday, Jan. 31, 4pm: Prof. Anthony Kaye's lecture on Nat Turner, 7191 Helen C. White

Week 3: Feb. 5 – The Atlantic Context, pt. 1

read: Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 1-186 (including endnotes)

write: Post three questions and one reflection to the discussion list on Learn@UW by Monday at midnight. **5%**

Week 4: Feb. 12 – The Atlantic Context, pt. 2

read: Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 187-355 (including endnotes)

write: Write a 250-word reflection on the following question: under what circumstances was violence *not* necessary during the Atlantic slave trade? **5%**

Week 5: Feb 19 – Slave Conspiracies in Early America

read: Lepore, *New York Burning*

write: Lepore writes that "slaves suspected of conspiracy constituted both a phantom political party and an ever-threatening revolution." In no more than 500 words explain the relationship between this assertion and the overall argument of *New York Burning*. **7.5%**

Week 6: Feb 26 – Individual Reports (starting points and the colonial era)

Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*
 Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*
 Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*
 Mavis Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration, and Betrayal*
 Mark M. Smith, ed., *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt*

Week 7: March 4 – The Haitian Revolution

read: Laurent Dubois and David Geggus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*, entire book

write: In no more than 250 words, explain what Dubois believes were the most important divisions among residents of Saint Domingue leading to the rise to power of Toussaint L'Ouverture. **5%**

Week 8: March 11 – A Revolution Echoes in the United States

read: Douglas Egerton, "Gabriel's Conspiracy and the Election of 1800" (posted)
 James Sidbury, "Saint Domingue in Virginia: Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery, 1790-1800" (posted)
 Junius Rodriguez, "Rebellion on the River Road: The Ideology and Influence of Louisiana's German Coast Slave Insurrection of 1811" (posted)
 David Geggus, "The Enigma of Jamaica in the 1790s: New Light on the Causes of Slave Rebellions" (posted)

write: In no more than 500 words, assess the relative merits of the arguments by Egerton, Sidbury, and Rodriguez in light of David Geggus's arguments about Jamaica. **7.5%**

Week 9: March 25 – Individual Reports (antebellum and post-Haitian revolts)

Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*
 John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*
 Peter Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance*
 Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas*
 J. Leitch Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People*

Week 10: April 1 – The Case of Denmark Vesey

read: Forum, "The Making of a Slave Conspiracy," part 1: *WMQ* 58:4 (Oct. 2001): 913-976 and part 2: *WMQ* 59:1 (Jan. 2002): 135-202. These are available on the History Cooperative via the UW Libraries e-resources gateway.

write: Post reflections on the following questions to the discussion list on Learn@UW:
 - What are the most important epistemological questions raised by this debate?
 - To what extent can we know what happened in Charleston during this period? **5%**

Week 11: April 8 – Slave Revolts in Antebellum Imaginations

read: Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*
Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno"

Week 12: April 15 – Pamphlets

read: At least three pamphlets discussing slave revolts from the *Slavery* microfiche series. Choose two that have content you find both compelling and interpretable. Using MADCAT, JSTOR, and your wits, produce a bibliography of at least three scholarly books and/or articles providing crucial context for each of these two pamphlets. We will discuss these in class.

By this point you should be thinking seriously about your final essay. Possible topics for this 6-8-page work are:

- 1) Write an essay analyzing one aspect of one of the pamphlets you read. This essay should make an argument about the pamphlet's content, context, or connection to other texts or events.
- 2) Answer one of the following historiographical questions:
 - To what extent can the American Civil War be considered a slave revolt?
 - Based on the works you have read this semester, how useful is Eugene Genovese's distinction between rebellion and revolution?
- 3) Develop and answer your own question about the historiography of slave revolts in the Americas.

Week 13: April 22 – No class meeting - individual meetings with Prof. Kantrowitz

Prior to your meeting with me on April 23 or 24, decide which of the assignments you want to do and develop a bibliography, a set of possible arguments, and a list of your questions and concerns. Bring these with you to our meeting. If you want me to read a draft, you must bring it with you to this meeting.

Week 14: April 29 – Individual Reports (crises of slavery in the era of emancipation)

Ira Berlin et al., eds., *Freedom's Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War*

Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898*

Winthrop Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy*

Benjamin Quarles, *Allies for Freedom: Blacks and John Brown*

Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (1st half)

Week 15: May 6 – final meeting; papers due**Assessment**

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| Participation in discussion | 30% |
| Weekly writing assignments (weeks 2-9) @ 5-10% | 40% |
| individual report | 10% |
| final essay | 20% |